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WHY CRYPTOZOOLOGY?

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ABSTRACT: One of cryptozoology's main concerns is the possible survival of animals thought to be long extinct. Because the geological record is incomplete, the possibility of fossil animals surviving to the present cannot be ruled out. Comparison is made between the objects of study of zoology and the non-animal subjects of other disciplines, including botany, and the conclusion is drawn that the elusiveness of some animals is the main reason for the existence of, and need for, cryptozoology. Given the nature of cryptic animals, cryptozoology has to apply its own methods of research.

INTRODUCTION

Since the article "What Is Cryptozoology?" by Bernard Heuvelmans (1982), published in the first issue of this journal, has not made critics any less vociferous (May 1984, Simpson 1984, Diamond 1985), it seems worthwhile to devote more attention to the *raison d'être* of the discipline. One of cryptozoology's main concerns is the possible unrecognized "persistence of presumed extinct animals to the present time or to the recent past" (*The ISC Newsletter* 1982). Consequently, we should examine the problem of extinction and survival in relation to cryptozoology.

THE EXTINCTION-SURVIVAL DICHOTOMY

Recent attention to the notion of species extinction has somewhat obscured the phenomenon of species survival. Both extinction and survival are *conditio sine qua non* of biological evolution. But, man's intervention apart, dying and living in nature are so propitiously balanced that the variety of life and the number of species on earth have generally been on the increase for millions of years, this being due not only to the ongoing process of speciation, but also to the persistence of old forms.

This being so, how do we know precisely what is extinct and what is extant in biology? According to Charles Darwin (1929: 280, 299), "No fixed law seems to determine the length of time during which any single species or

any single genus endures,” and “the utter extinction of a whole group of species has sometimes been a slow process, from the survival of a few descendants, lingering in protected and isolated situations.” A noted Soviet paleontologist, L. S. Davitashvili (1948: 486), has this to say on the subject: “It is always necessary to remember the incompleteness of the geological record. The first appearance of a given species in the geological record and its disappearance from the latter can in no way be taken for the dates of its origin and final extinction. The real life span of a species (or a group of species) is usually much longer than the period determined from the geological record. Consequently, the dating of the extinction of a form or a group is not as simple a matter as may appear from the frequent citing in the paleontological literature of extinction dates for various organisms.” (Author’s translation.)

Put another way, it is a matter of observation, of empirical investigation, whether an organism is extinct or extant. And here there is an interesting difference between specimens and species. If a skeleton is found, it means a specimen is dead for good; and as long as a species (or other taxon) is known *only* from the fossil record, it is presumed to be extinct. But nothing prevents its “rising from the dead” the moment its living representatives are discovered. This having happened a number of times, there is nothing highly unusual or unscientific in expecting or predicting further occurrences of this kind.

What irritates critics is that some cryptozoologists are willing to acknowledge the possible survival today of dinosaurs and pre-*sapiens* hominids. Let us note, in this connection, that the wholesale dying out of the dinosaurs had intrigued paleobiologists long before the advent of modern cryptozoology, and that, despite many attempts, no fully satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon has yet been offered. Indeed, who can convincingly explain why such reptile forms as crocodiles, lizards, snakes, and turtles survive today, but dinosaurs—which, incidentally, were of different sizes and had the widest range of distribution—do not. Or, indeed, why gibbons, orangutans, chimpanzees, and gorillas are still living, but not *Gigantopithecus*, *Australopithecus*, *Homo erectus*, or *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*? Survival of any of these forms thought to be extinct would actually solve, not pose, a problem. For we do know that they existed, and we can only speculate why they ceased to exist.

Thus, cryptozoology not only follows established scientific principles, but attempts to answer some topical questions confronting zoology today.

HIDDEN OR HIDING?

If the subjects of cryptozoology are “hidden” animals, then many sciences have their “hidden” objects: astronomers attempt to detect unknown celestial bodies “hidden” in the vastness of space (some of which cannot even

be observed optically); geologists search for minerals “hidden” in the earth; paleontologists search for “hidden” fossils, etc. Why, then, don’t we have cryptoastronomy, cryptogeology, etc.?

Up to a point, the history of exploration in botany is remarkably similar to that in zoology. The age of discovery in both is far from over. In the eighteenth century, Linnaeus described some 7,000 species of higher plants. Today, botanists know over 350,000 species of higher plants, and, according to specialists at Moscow University, not less than 2,000 new species of lower and higher plants are described every year from all over the world. The world flora, just as the world fauna, is characterized by the coexistence of evolutionary old and new forms. “Living fossils” are known among plants as well, as, for example, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, first described by paleobotanists and later found alive. And botanists also often depend on the testimony of native peoples in botanical exploration and the discovery of new species. Yet, there is no cryptobotany, nor is there going to be. Why not?

The answer is too obvious to be always noticed. There can be spectacular plants “hidden” in the jungle (e.g., *Victoria regia*), but there are no plants *hiding* anywhere. The difference between zoology and all other disciplines engaged in the study of inanimate or non-animal objects, is that the subjects of zoology have the *ability* to hide, and thus remain unknown or only vaguely known to science.

Two diverging behavioral strategies seem to have evolved to enhance the survival of species. Many species are highly open and visible—some even moving in herds and flocks—and usually have naturally high population densities; these species are generally well known to man. Other species, however, are less visible, and their population densities may be low; they survive because their secretive ways are adaptive.

For example, crows, pigeons, and sparrows are commonly observed by all, but it is unusual to observe an owl in the wild. Even more interesting are examples of these differing behavioral adaptations among related species: crow-jay; giraffe-okapi; baboon-orang-utan.

Of course, we know little or nothing about the population densities or reproductive rates of so-called “cryptids” (i.e., the subjects of cryptozoology), but there seems to be little doubt that the larger ones must be among the rarest of living species. It is reasonable to suppose that giant octopuses are not as numerous as those of moderate size, that sauropods, if extant, are not as numerous as turtles, and that Sasquatches (whatever form of pre-*sapiens* hominid or hominoid the species may represent) are not as numerous as bears in any given area.

It is difficult to find a rare mineral, it is time-consuming to locate a rare plant, *but it is many times more difficult and time-consuming to discover a cryptid, not only because it is rare, but also because, in contrast with minerals*

and plants, it attempts to avoid detection. To borrow Darwin's phrase, cryptids are "lingering in protected and isolated situations," such as deep waters, thick vegetation, or mountainous terrain. Being active and mobile, cryptids inevitably leave, from time to time, the depths of their sanctuaries and come into view of human beings. But they invariably retreat to their natural strongholds as soon as humans come in force to "discover" them. Hence, a cryptozoological situation: an animal is occasionally sighted by a local people or by visiting outsiders, but is absent from zoology's inventories of the Animal Kingdom.

That is the main answer to the question "why cryptozoology?" But there are also auxiliary ones, such as the difficulty of photographing elusive animals in the wild, the difficulty of retrieving specimens from remote areas, and the propensity of native peoples to attach certain beliefs to rare animals.

METHOD IN MADNESS

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary gives the following definition of science: "Science is systematized knowledge considered in reference to the discovery or understanding of truth."

First, it should be noted that the systematizing of knowledge and the discovery of truth are supposed to take time. Secondly, each discipline uses its own methods of discovering truth, methods that are best suited for its own particular purposes.

Let us spell out some common terms in cryptozoological research: eyewitness; testimony; identification; tracks; footprints; surveillance; reference files; photographs; laboratory analysis. Has all this been consciously borrowed from a criminal investigations department? Not at all. The remarkable coincidence of terms came about quite naturally and spontaneously because criminologists and cryptozoologists utilize similar methods.

The first order of business in cryptozoology is to collect and analyze the testimony of witnesses. There is no end to mirth, scoffing, and solemn warnings from critics in this connection. When preparing for an expedition in search of the Yeti, Charles Stonor (1955: 7) was given this advice by a zoologist: "Do remember that a Native [sic] will always tell you what he thinks will please you and what you want him to say." And here is a warning from none other than George Gaylord Simpson (1984: 12): "Humans are the most inventive, deceptive, and gullible of all animals."

It is noteworthy that such an attitude is generally evinced by individuals whose professions are not concerned with collecting and analyzing human testimony. Of course, all testimony is subject to doubt, but it is one thing to state that men are fallible—or that some people are fond of spinning a tale—and quite another to assert that no man is trustworthy, and no witness can tell the truth.

The role of the witness is often overlooked because it is taken for granted.

To show that this kind of evidence is valid not only in court, I shall refer to the physicist's knowledge of a phenomenon called ball lightning. Since there is no generally accepted physical theory for this phenomenon, the reality of ball lightning is doubted by some physicists, who suggest that it is an illusion caused by the effect of a flash of ordinary lightning on the retina of the eye. To determine the truth, a team of Soviet physicists, headed by I. Imyaninov, has collected about 1,500 eyewitness reports of ball lightning worldwide. These reports, both published and solicited, were subjected to computer analysis. The Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* reported on September 30, 1976, what Imyaninov stated about their findings: "Collective portraits of the phenomenon made by eyewitnesses of different nations and at different times have coincided, and this in itself is telling proof of the reality of ball lightning." Similarly, in cryptozoology the process of "demythification" of evidence starts with the analysis of eyewitness accounts.

The next most important—and for terrestrial cryptids, inevitable—kind of evidence is tracks. This would seem to be perfect zoological material, but many zoologists simply do not accept tracks of unknown animals. Fortunately, on this subject cryptozoology finds support in paleontology, which is concerned, among other things, with the footprints of unknown, albeit extinct, animals. For example, Mossman and Sarjeant (1983: 75) state the following: "The skeletons of extinct land animals in museums suggest that the main fossil evidence for such animals is bones. This is not the case. The bones of the animals are very much rarer than their tracks. Indeed, many extinct land animals are known only from their tracks; their bodily remains appear never to have been preserved." The authors even find certain advantages of this kind of evidence compared with bones: "The animal's tracks and trails . . . are a much more extended and dynamic testament. Studying these clues to an animal's behavior, the paleontologist is able, as it were, to see the animal in action."

In cryptozoology, footprint evidence plays a decisive role in probing the reality and identity of the so-called relict hominoids (Yeti, Sasquatch, etc.). The best studied is the collection of footprints of the North American Sasquatch (Green 1978, Hunter with Dahinden 1973), which occasioned Krantz (1972: 103) to state: "No matter how incredible it may seem that the sasquatch [sic] exists and has remained uncaught, it is even more incredible to believe in all the attributes of the hypothetical human track-maker Even if none of the hundreds of sightings had ever occurred, we would still be forced to conclude that a giant bipedal primate does indeed inhabit the forests of the Pacific Northwest." Demythification of the Sasquatch footprint evidence has been further advanced in subsequent works (Krantz 1983, Bayanov, Bourtsev, and Dahinden 1984a, Buckley 1984).

There is no denying that such footprints can be, and are known to have been, faked. However, the crucial question is not whether some tracks have

been faked, but whether some are authentic. The latter question is answered by the investigators involved with a most emphatic "yes." And, to cite Napier (1973: 203), "if *one* track and *one* report is true-bill, then myth must be chucked out of the window and reality admitted through the front door."

A major "tool" of cryptozoology is photography, both still and motion picture. Again, the critics maintain that photographs and films are easily faked, and therefore cannot be accepted as evidence. And, again, these opinions come from individuals who do not vitally depend on photography in their professions.

A lot of work has been done on, and much information obtained from, the Patterson-Gimlin Sasquatch film, the study of which I was fortunate to participate in. We have subjected the film to a systematic and many-sided analysis. We have matched the evidence of the film against the other categories of evidence, and tested its subject with our criteria of distinctiveness, consistency, and naturalness. Our conclusion: "The Patterson-Gimlin movie is an authentic documentary of a genuine female hominoid, popularly known as Sasquatch or Bigfoot, filmed in the Bluff Creek area of Northern California not later than October 1967" (Bayanov, Bourtsev, and Dahinden 1984b: 232).

Let me stress that, given the nature of cryptids, and barring their chance discovery, their *planned* discovery, which is the hoped-for intent of cryptozoology, is almost certain to be preceded by eyewitness, footprint, and photographic evidence. Thus, the existence of such evidence, and the study and evaluation of it, is a clear indication that cryptozoology is proceeding appropriately as a particular line of scientific inquiry.

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